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## THE LABOR SITUATION IN MEXICO

The industrial constitution of Mexico varies so fundamentally from that of the United States and the racial conditions are also so different, that it is impossible to understand the labor problem of the country without a discussion of the fundamental social conditions there existing.

The population of Mexico is at present about 15,000,000 or 16,000,000. According to the census of 1895 this population was given at 12,632,427, and according to the preliminary figures for 1900 at 13,545,462. It is probable, however, that in each case the enumeration was incomplete, as owing to the ignorance of the population and the fear that the census was merely preliminary to a military draft and increased taxes, a large portion of the population evaded enumeration. Señor Romero estimated that in 1895 the true population was about 20 per cent greater than that returned, or in other words, about 15,000,000. On this calculation the population at present would be about 16,000,000.

This population is, for the most part, concentrated on the great central plateau of Mexico and lives therefore in a temperate, if not a cold climate. The greater part of Mexico consists of a high plateau, rising from the Rio Grande to the City of Mexico, and situated between the two coast ranges of mountains. Upon this plateau, which is called the cold zone, it would appear from the census figures that about 75 per cent of the people are massed, while on the temperate slopes of the mountains two-thirds of the remaining quarter of the population live; thus leaving about one-twelfth of the entire population resident in the hot, low coast lands. This massing of the population in the colder portions of the country has been of vital industrial importance in the past.

The population, and above all the laboring population, of Mexico is preponderatingly Indian. Unlike the aborigines of Anglo-America (Canada and the United States), the Indians of Mexico have maintained their existence and may still be said to form the backbone of the Mexican population. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Baron Humboldt was in Mexico, it was supposed that the Indians, who then constituted 60 per cent of the population, would

increase at the expense of the white and mixed races, but this development has not taken place. From the last available figures which we possess of the distribution of the Mexican population according to race, those of 1875, the native population forms 37 per cent, the mixed or *mestizo* race 43 per cent; while the whites make up 20 per cent. This relative decline in the number of Indians has been accounted for by their very high death rate, owing to malnutrition, insufficient shelter, lack of suitable medical attendance, drunkenness and liability to disease, and the decadence and probable ultimate disappearance of the Indians are subjects of frequent discussion. It cannot straightway be assumed, however, that this race is dying out, although its very rapid incorporation into the mixed race seems probable. The mixed race, however, is preponderantly Indian and the proportion of Mexican natives possessing no Indian blood must be very small indeed.

None but approximate results can be obtained from a study of the vital statistics of the Mexican population, owing to the extreme inaccuracy of these figures. From such data as are available, it would appear that in 1898 there were 489,933 births registered by the civil authorities and 256,474 registered by priests. It is, however, impossible to state just to what extent these are duplications. Probably the nearest approach to a determination of the actual number of births would be based upon the death registers and the figures for the increase in population over and above that due to immigration. These figures would place the number of births at about 625,000 for the year 1898, or about 28 per cent more than those given by the civil registry. The indications point, however, to a very high birth rate, especially if we assign the recent increase in the number of births to the persons actually included in the census returns. Of the births actually registered over two-fifths (in 1898, 42.5 per cent), were illegitimate. This percentage is very much higher in some states, amounting to over 75 per cent in Michoacan and to 93.6 per cent in the district of Zamora in the last mentioned state. This high proportion of illegitimacy, however, is in large part merely technical, as it represents the offspring of marriages solemnized by the church, but not registered by the civil authorities.

The statistics of marriages, which appear to be defective and incomplete, show an extremely early marriage age. In 1898, of all women, including widows who registered their marriage, over one-

fourth were between the ages of twelve and sixteen, and of the total number so registering their marriage, 54 per cent were below the age of twenty; while in the state of Yucatan 82.5 per cent were below that age. The early age at which such marriages are contracted and the considerable extent to which the civil, if not also the religious, sanction is dispensed with, are indicative of general improvidence on the part of the population. The death rate of the country, as shown from the statistics of mortality, is very high, the figures for such states as Yucatan being extraordinary.

The population of Mexico is, upon the whole, remarkably homogeneous. Of the total population 99.6 per cent are of native birth, foreigners forming only  $\frac{1}{250}$  of the population. Religiously, this population is equally homogeneous; 99.1 per cent of all persons being Roman Catholics, while only three-tenths of 1 per cent of the population acknowledge any religion other than the Roman Catholic. The population shows an excess of females over males, an excess which is apparently increasing, and in its age distribution it shows a shifting of the population toward the lower age classes, resembling in that respect the distribution, according to age, of the American negro. The official language of the country is Spanish, but statistics still show over 2,000,000 inhabitants whose mother tongue is not Spanish but some Indian dialect; while the true figures for such non-Spanish speaking Mexicans would probably be double that amount. In many districts there is practically no Spanish spoken. Thus, for example, in fourteen districts of Yucatan, excluding two of the coast districts, 83.7 per cent, or over five-sixths of the whole population, speak Maya, while only one-sixth speak Spanish.

The chief characteristic of native labor is its apathy. This is true both of the high and low lands and is due largely to climatic conditions, and to a considerable degree to the absence of winters. This indolence is also to some extent the heritage from the industrial conditions prevailing during the Spanish régime, which were aggravated during the first half century of independence. The widespread drunkenness of the lower classes of the population and the excessive use of stimulants of all kinds also detrimentally affect the labor of the country, while the general improvidence of the lower classes of the population may be noted in their tendency to gambling, their general unreliability, and their failure to be incited to more intense work by increased remuneration.

One of the clearest indications of the general inefficiency of the laboring class in Mexico is to be found in the statistics of education. According to the industrial census of 1895, 64.1 per cent of the population was unable to read or write although within reading age; 2.6 per cent of the population could read but not write, and 18.7 per cent were illiterates owing to youth; while of the total population only 14.3 per cent could both read and write, leaving 0.3 per cent with literacy unknown. If we exclude from the statistics those who were too young to be considered and those as well whose literacy was unknown, it would appear that only 17.6 per cent of the resulting population were complete literates. As the persons who escape the census enumeration belong, on the whole, to the lower and most degraded portions of the population, it is safe to assume that even this small percentage of literacy is considerably above the actual. The deficient instruction of the Mexican population, however, is being rapidly remedied and good schools are being established in all parts of the country. In the year 1898 there were 702,685 scholars in the public schools and 125,393 in the private schools, making a total of 828,078 scholars for the country.

While the Mexicans possess certain qualities which unfit them for efficient labor, they also possess characteristics which are highly advantageous. Though not of great physique, the average Mexican is capable of great endurance, especially in everything pertaining to walking or carrying. This, together with a high degree of patience and docility, a remarkable gift of imitation and a very marked artistic sense, constitutes a certain natural advantage which will be of increasing value to the Mexican workman in a later stage of his industrial development.

The statistics of occupation of the Mexican population can be obtained from the Industrial Census for the year 1895, or from a monograph by the author, on "Labor Conditions in Mexico," published in the *Bulletin of the Department of Labor*, January, 1902, from which the facts contained in the present article are mainly taken. These figures are based upon the returns made by individuals employed and not by industrial establishments. This arrangement naturally prevents certain groupings of employees under the general industry in which they are engaged and throws them into a class determined by the special work which they do. The enumeration is

also by no means perfect, the classifications being in many cases indeterminate and very far from being mutually exclusive.

"The most salient feature of the statistics is the disproportionately large percentage of persons, and especially males, engaged in agriculture, and the particularly large percentage of farm hands or *peones de campo*. Especially is this proportion of agricultural laborers large in comparison with those engaged in mining, commerce, the professions and the industries and fine arts. With regard to industrial employees, the most striking fact about the statistics herewith presented seems to be the very large percentage of workmen in occupations that require no great division of labor but are carried on for a limited market and in small establishments. The statistics of bricklayers, carpenters, seamstresses, palm-mat makers, blacksmiths, horticulturists, laundresses, bakers, cigar makers, tailors and shoemakers, as compared with the other categories, point to a large percentage of persons employed in industries conducted on a small scale."<sup>1</sup>

It may be seen from these figures that by far the most important group is composed of agriculturists, including proprietors, small owners and farm hands. This group makes up 2,890,991 persons, or 23.2 per cent of the total population, male and female, given as present in the census. In some states this proportion is much higher. Thus in Guanajuato, the proportion is 28 per cent and in Yucatan 27.8, the proportion being naturally smallest in the Federal District, including the City of Mexico, where only 6.2 per cent of the population are agriculturists. It is in this district that the industrial and professional classes are chiefly grouped, the Federal District or the City of Mexico including one-fifth of the lawyers, over one-fifth of the druggists, one-sixth of the physicians, and almost one-third of the engineers of the country.

As before stated, the chief employment of the population of Mexico is to be found in agriculture. Although Mexico is usually associated with mining, its chief industry is agriculture. While its exportation has always been chiefly in the form of metals, its production of agricultural products is considerably in excess of its mineral products. From the statistics of occupation above quoted, moreover, it would appear that the population was dependent upon

<sup>1</sup> Bulletin of the Department of Labor, January, 1902. Subsequent quotations are from the same source.

agriculture to an extent far exceeding that of most countries of western Europe. Thus there were employed in agriculture 2,880,482 males out of an active body of 3,779,953 engaged in gainful occupations other than employment in household or domestic service; or in other words, 76.2 per cent of the whole.

"The statistics of the distribution of persons engaged in agriculture among employers, clerks, administrators and independent agriculturists, as compared with farm laborers, throw light upon the character of land tenure and cultivation. In France, for example, according to the census of 1891, of the total number of persons engaged in agriculture, 54.6 per cent were counted as employers or independent farmers, 1.2 per cent as employees, clerks and overseers, and only 44.2 per cent as workmen or hands. In Mexico, on the contrary, of the total number of persons employed in 1895 only 1.7 per cent were included in administrators, overseers and assistants, and only 9.7 per cent as farmers (*agricultores*), while 88.4 per cent or, if the live-stock hands be included, 88.6 per cent were farm hands or day laborers (*peones*)."<sup>2</sup>

The great mass of this labor is unproductive. According to the crop statistics of the Mexican government for the year 1898, the value of all agricultural products was less than \$250,000,000 silver, equal to less than \$125,000,000 gold; while according to the census of occupation the number of persons employed was 2,880,842. It is conceivable that the number of persons engaged is somewhat exaggerated; and there can be very little doubt that the value of the crops is considerably underestimated. On the showing of these figures, however, the production of agricultural products per male employed amounts only to \$86.78 silver per year, or on the assumption of a silver dollar being worth fifty cents gold, to a little over eighty-three cents per week per male employed. Another indication is also furnished by the fact that, despite the large amount of labor absorbed by agriculture, there is but a small exportation of its products, while the great movement of cereals is toward, and not from, Mexico.

Statistics of agricultural wages in Mexico are practically non-existent. From time to time certain figures have been published by the Federal Government or by private persons, but all such data

<sup>2</sup>The word "*peon*" is now used in the sense of agricultural worker of a low, unskilled type, although in former times it signified approximately what is understood by the word *serf*.

have been in the nature of estimates rather than of exact figures.\* Such figures as are obtainable frequently give nothing more than the average for maximum and minimum wages and do not even in either instance always state whether rations are included or not. Moreover, the conclusions drawn merely from the rate of wages are in many cases misleading, owing to the fact that the employer may be bound to the plantation by indebtedness and be forced to purchase supplies at exorbitant prices. Generally speaking, the agricultural wages are lower in those states of the great central plateau where the population is dense, but where manufacturing industries have not yet been greatly developed. In these regions there is frequently an excess of population over and above the needs of the industry and a consequent wasteful expenditure of human effort. Where the population is dense and manufacturing industries are beginning, however, wages rise to a higher level, and this is becoming more clearly observable in the neighborhood of the large cities. Agricultural wages are still higher in those states which are hot or in which the climate is unhealthy. "Generally speaking, wages are high in proportion to the sparseness of the agricultural population, to the heat and unhealthiness of the region, to the presence of large industrial establishments in the neighborhood, and by reason of the proximity to great cities."

Any statement of the average rate of agricultural wages in Mexico can be nothing more than a guess, but in the absence of absolutely accurate statistics such an estimate, based upon the faulty statistical material that is obtainable and upon observations of the author and of others, is perhaps better than no statement at all. With due reserve, therefore, it may be stated that the average wage of agricultural labor on the great central plateau is not far from three reals or thirty-seven and one-half cents silver; or in other words, that the wages expressed in gold are from one-fifth to one-seventh of those paid to agricultural labor in the northern states of the United States.

To a large extent the agricultural laborers in Mexico are pure-blooded Indians, or Indians with but a slight admixture of European blood. For the most part they are illiterate, ambitionless and passive, if not opposed, to the introduction of new machinery. "Their rela-

\*For a summary of such figures as have been published, see article in the *Bulletin of the Department of Labor* before cited.



tion to their employer differs in various parts of the country and on various plantations, and in many places it is more like the conditions existing on the plantations in the southern part of the United States before the war than like the position of farm hands in the northern states at the present time." "The conditions, however, appear to be improving; schools are being established and agricultural machinery introduced, and the extension of railroads gives to the peon the advantage of legal redress in case of unwarranted aggression."

While agricultural wages are nominally higher in tropical Mexico than in other parts of the country, the condition of such workmen cannot be said to be better. The standard of life in tropical Mexico is very low and the requirements in the way of food, clothing and shelter cost but little labor. The people of the uplands do not desire residence in the low countries and the available labor supply of the planters becomes insufficient, especially in view of the increasing demand for tropical products. "In consequence of these conditions and of the improvidence and very low standard of life of the peons, there has grown up in tropical America a system of more or less compulsory labor, existing side by side with a freer system of labor."

These conditions differ in various parts of the country, but the system of enforced labor is carried further in the sisal grass plantations of Yucatan than elsewhere. On such plantations there is usually to be found a body of peons called *criados* or *sirvientes*, who usually have been born on the plantations. These *criados* are bound to the soil by indebtedness, since the young Yucatecan usually borrows from \$100 to \$200 when he desires to marry, and it is not the intention either of the borrower or lender to have this sum repaid. On the contrary, it usually increases through occasional misfortunes of the *criado* and through additional advances made by the planter. The law as applied in Yucatan apparently provides for the specific performance of a contract agreed upon or else the repayment of the money. "The repayment of the debt thus represents the cost of an emancipation, which is not desired or attempted, especially as it may represent the gross wages of several years." "The peon rarely, if ever, achieves independence, and the transference of a workman from one employer to another is only effected by means of the new employer paying to the former one the amount of the debt contracted. The system thus resembles slavery, not only in the compulsion under

which the peon works, but in the large initial expense required of the planter when making his first investment in labor."

The conditions of agricultural labor in Mexico are not entirely satisfactory. "The system of indebtedness and practical serfdom is not without its bad effects upon labor; it involves the planter also in great risk and large expenditure. The system results in the destruction of any desire on the part of the peon to be independent or to think for himself, and seems to lead to improvidence of all sorts. The debt incurred by the planter is frequently very large and may probably be many times in excess of the value of his land. It also necessitates a complicated and expensive system of labor agents and assistants to obtain new contract laborers, to prevent their flight, and to return them in the event of their running away."

"As a general rule, the labor cost to the planter in tropical Mexico is considerably greater than the money wages received by the peons. This cost includes the price or labor paid for the rations, the cost of obtaining the workingmen or of bringing them back in case of flight, together with the interest on the money advanced in loans and the occasional loss of the capital so advanced, as a result of the death or successful flight of the debtor."

"The low wages, however, appear to be largely the result of the ignorance and improvidence of the natives, and it is somewhat questionable whether higher daily wages would permanently benefit the peon, unless at the same time his standard of life rose. The experience of railroad companies and other employers of labor in Mexico has been that higher daily wages increase idleness, and that, if the wages for a day's work be doubled, the number of working days will be halved. It is also a fact confirmed by the experience and observation of many employers that the amount of labor performed bears no direct relation to the wages, and that even where work is done by the task instead of by the day the promise of additional remuneration will seldom result in an increased output."

"Another feature of the labor situation in Mexico, and above all, in tropical Mexico, which proves the inertness and ignorance of the laboring population, is the tenacity with which conventional rates of wages and conventional methods of payment are adhered to. The amount of land or the amount of cotton cloth given to the workman remains constantly the same for long periods, and the amount of work which makes up a day's task remains the same, although the

conditions themselves may have changed. The depreciation of the currency appears to have little effect upon the rate of wages of the agricultural population, although, in view of the fact that the articles consumed by the workmen are so few and so exclusively of home production, the effect of such a depreciation upon prices may perhaps be exaggerated. The quiescence and inertia of the population, in view of the depreciated currency, may be witnessed, however, in the district of Soconusco, in the state of Chiapas, where wages both of the free and of the indebted laborers are paid in Guatemalan currency called *cachuco*, which is about 25 per cent less in value than the Mexican silver."

The employment of Mexican labor in mining has fluctuated largely during the last four centuries. It is improbable that mining was engaged in to a very large extent in the time of the Aztecs, but from the date of the Spanish conquest a great body of labor was diverted to this industry. The conditions under which this labor was carried on were for a long time extremely severe and resulted in an exceedingly high death rate, but fortunately the principal Mexican mines known to the Spaniards were situated in temperate zones at a height of from 5,600 to 6,600 feet, and not like those of Peru near the region of perpetual snow. The condition of the miners gradually improved during the Spanish régime; labor became free and wages rose and at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Mexican miner was, according to the testimony of Humboldt, "the best paid of all miners."

After the achievement of independence, during the wars from 1811 to 1821, the number of miners and the wages of the men employed seem to have decreased, but since then both the number of men employed and the wages of the miners have risen, although the latter appear to be on a lower level when measured in gold than they were a century ago. In 1899 the number of persons employed in Mexican mines was 106,536, including 1,288 women and 5,852 children. The output amounted to about 5,200,000 tons of a value of about \$89,000,000. The persons employed here do not include some 29,192 persons employed in smelting and reduction works.

The diet of the Mexican working classes is restricted both as to quantity and quality. Small quantities of meat, eggs, milk and other animal products are consumed and the range of vegetables and fruits, at least upon the plateau, is also limited. The chief

article of diet is maize or Indian corn. This cereal has been the chief staple of consumption for many centuries and predominates to a remarkable extent in the diet. It is largely consumed in little flat cakes called *tortillas*, but is prepared in various other shapes. Near the coast a mixture of corn-meal and brown sugar is also largely eaten. Another principal article of diet among Mexicans is the bean. "This may almost be called the characteristically Mexican food, since corn is the main article of diet in many nations. Even in the higher social ranks, where European, and more especially French, cooking seems to prevail, the *frijoles* or beans appear to hold a disproportionate place in the menu. Among the common people the consumption is very great." The crop statistics give a total production of about 12,500,000 bushels of a total value of less than \$18,000,000 silver; but this is probably very much below the mark. "The consumption of meat, eggs, milk, butter, fresh vegetables and fruits, on the other hand, appears to be small on the plateau. The commerce in perishable food seems to be quite undeveloped and the absence of large cold-storage plants renders it difficult even for the richer classes to obtain vegetables or fruits grown at a distance, while the prices of such articles render their use impossible for the poorer people. The quality of meat used by the poorer people is very poor, the cattle are inferior to American animals, and little care is used in breeding. For animal food, recourse is often had in the large cities to meats in such condition and of such a nature as to be neither appetizing nor wholesome; but, while the consumption of meat among the better-to-do classes is extraordinarily great, especially in view of the climate, the meat consumption of the working classes is extremely limited."

"The crude, tasteless and monotonous diet of the Mexican of the laboring classes is rendered tolerable by an excessive use of condiments, namely, of red and green pepper (which dulls the taste), and a frequently enormous consumption of intoxicating drinks. Chief among Mexican drinks is *pulque*, which is made by fermenting the juice of the maguey plant." "In the lowlands of the coast brandy made from sugar-cane takes the place of *pulque*, and in other places, notably in Guadalajara and other places in Jalisco, the consumption of alcoholic liquors is chiefly diverted to *mescal* or *tequila*, a brandy which is very much in favor. In the neighborhood of the capital,

however, pulque must be considered not only as a stimulant, but as a staple of consumption, important, though deleterious."<sup>4</sup>

The diet of the laborer is restricted in quantity as much as in quality and the insufficient nutrition of large masses of the population is attested not only by the faulty crops but by the statistics of mortality in the city. Large masses of the population suffer from anemia, and while the endurance of the Mexican is great it is conceded by the majority of authorities that his capacity and desire for work "cannot increase very materially unless there is at the same time an increase in the amount and a greater variety in the kinds of food consumed."

The prices of food and other necessities are not low. For corn, which is by all means the chief article of consumption, the prices in Mexico in silver very much exceed the gold prices of the United States, and as a general rule the silver prices in Mexico exceed the silver equivalent of the gold prices in the United States. Despite the enormous number of men employed in the production of corn in Mexico the movement of the cereal is usually toward Mexico and never from that country. The price of cotton, which also enters largely into the consumption of the working classes, is very much higher in Mexico than in the United States, as a great part of the supply is imported from the latter country. The price of cotton cloth is even more in excess of the price in the United States. Prices of other commodities cannot be so easily compared, it would seem improbable, however, that the Mexican laborer of the unskilled type can secure greater quantities of the actual articles of his present consumption in Mexico than he could obtain of the same articles in the United States with the same amount of money.<sup>5</sup>

From the very inception of Mexican independence the government of that country has cherished the ideal of increasing the population by means of immigration. Many attempts were made to attract

<sup>4</sup>In 1898 there were produced (and consumed), according to the report of agricultural statistics (see *Anuario Estadístico*), 15,780,723 gallons of sugar-cane brandy, of a value of \$7,605,266 (Mexican currency); 11,565,521 gallons of *mescal* or *tequila*, valued at \$8,958,981; 64 869,585 gallons of pulque, valued at \$4,637,531; 97,000,873 gallons of *tlachique*, valued at \$5,391,301; and 705,598 gallons of brandy made from pulque, valued at \$537,139. Nearly five-sixths of the *mescal* was produced in Jalisco and Zacatecas, a large part going to Guadalajara, while almost half of the pulque was raised in the little State of Tlascala.

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of the question of the labor of women and children and of the legal status of labor in Mexico, see the article, before quoted, in the *Bulletin of the Department of Labor*.

immigrants, despite the unfortunate experience with American settlers in Texas. During the short period of the French empire these attempts were renewed with great vigor, although without success, and again in 1885 an earnest attempt was made to colonize the country by securing both to immigrants and to colonists from other parts of the same country special privileges and advantages. The total result of the attempt to secure immigration, however, has not been considerable. No great body of European immigrants has been attracted and the industries of the country have been practically forced to rely upon native labor, despite the fact that this labor is in many cases extremely inefficient. It has been found practically impossible, in view of the low wages prevailing for unskilled labor in the country, to secure foreign immigrants. A more than usually strenuous attempt has been made to secure Italian immigration, but without great success, except in so far as skilled labor is concerned.

Nor does it seem probable that the attempts to populate Mexico with European immigrants will be successful for several decades at least, unless special inducements are offered. The advantages which Mexico offers at present cannot be compared with those which may be obtained from Argentine, and perhaps Chile. "Despite the large demand for labor, wages in Mexico are very low, and the increasing demand does not seem to have had a proportional effect in increasing its remuneration, when expressed in gold. The Mexican people appear to be on the horns of a dilemma, since it appears that the large body of labor cannot improve until immigration takes place, and that immigration cannot take place until the condition of labor is improved."<sup>6</sup>

While no immigration of unskilled labor from Europe may be expected, it is quite probable that a certain number of skilled foreign workmen may continue to be employed as the demand for such workmen, although small, is intense. If any large immigration of unskilled labor ensues, it will most probably consist of Chinese or East Indian coolies. By a treaty concluded in Washington, on December 14, 1899, between Mexico and China, the way for the

<sup>6</sup>This dilemma is somewhat similar to that which confronted the Mexican Government a generation ago, when the railroads leading to the United States could not be built without the country being richer and more peaceable and when the wealth and security of the country could not be advanced without the railroads. In this case the Government obviated the whole difficulty by itself assuming the risks of the operation in the form of a railroad guaranty. The analogy in the present case is not difficult to find.

immigration of Chinese into the United States was paved and Chinese immigration on a large scale rendered more practicable. There appears to be a strong demand for such immigration on the part of many of the tropical planters, but the question has not yet arrived at a point where the future policy of the nation can confidently be predicted.

"Generally speaking, labor in Mexico is cheap, inefficient, unintelligent and untrustworthy. Wages of labor are considerably lower than those prevailing in Western Europe, and very much lower than those current in the United States. The natural aptitude of the Mexican and even of the pure Indian is far from despicable, but the mass of the population is untrained to economic thought or industrial action, and there is a general apathy and disinclination to take thought of the morrow and a general satisfaction with the prevailing low standard of life. The diet of the workman in Mexico is greatly restricted, both in variety and amount, and in great masses of the population is so deficient as to cause malnutrition and chronic anemia. The agricultural laborer is more particularly lacking in energy, and while his endurance is great, his disposition is so lethargic, and there is so studied a slowness about his movements, as to render his labor ineffective and consequently dear." The Mexican laborer is also, as a rule, not skillful in the use of machinery and the race does not seem to be pre-eminently successful in the invention or adoption of modern industrial methods. Frequently, in spite of the ignorance of the laborer, it is cheaper to carry on work by machinery than by manual labor but the low cost of labor and the high cost of coal or power render the substitution of machine for muscle power somewhat difficult. The improvidence of a great portion of the Mexican laboring population and the unsteadiness and unreliability of the labor supply have led in certain portions of tropical Mexico to a labor system which is in some respects similar to that of legal slavery, while often in portions of temperate Mexico the ignorance and dependence of the workman, especially, the agricultural laborer, place him in the power of his employer.

The conditions herein described, however, are rapidly changing. There was great improvement during the latter portion of the Spanish régime and while conditions during revolutionary times were extremely bad, the groundwork for permanent reform was secured by the war for independence. "The marked improvement in the

condition of the labor class actually dates from the victory of the Liberal party, and more particularly from the accession to the Presidency of the present incumbent, General Porfirio Diaz. Within the last twenty-five years peace has been established on a stable basis, security has been maintained, brigandage eradicated, interstate taxes abolished, finances reformed, railroads constructed, and industry, agriculture and mining established on a stable, permanent basis."

"Coincidentally with this material progress there has occurred in Mexico a great advance in education and in everything pertaining to the moral and intellectual advance of the people, and as a result of this progress the condition of the laboring population throughout the country has improved in security, in legal protection, in opportunities for labor, in regularity of employment, and in the amount of wages."

Probably the most potent single factor in improving the labor conditions has been the introduction of railroads. This result has been obtained by stimulating mining, agriculture and manufacturing, by establishing foreign markets, by strengthening the central government and securing to the employed a larger measure of protection by permitting him to change his place of residence, and consequently his master, by breaking up the narrow provincialism of rural centres, and finally by creating a direct demand for labor upon the railroad itself. The improvement in certain districts reached by the railroads has been almost revolutionary.

Generally speaking, the condition of the laboring population of Mexico has been improved, first, by the gradual, almost imperceptible raising of the general level; secondly, by a change from unskilled to skilled labor and the selection of persons for the higher grade and higher class occupations. The raising of the general level has been very slow and as far as real wages are concerned very slight. The improvement is more evident in the second direction. The labor of the country is still predominantly unskilled but the gradual displacement of unskilled by skilled labor, due to the introduction of machinery, may be seen both in a positive and negative manner; positively in the increase in the number of skilled laborers, negatively in the partial or complete cessation of various forms of socially unprofitable labor. The better class positions are frequently occupied at first by foreigners but the general tendency is for their gradual displacement by persons of native birth.



"In Mexico it may be said that the improvement in the conditions and remuneration of labor has been a result rather of outside influences than of any agitation or combined effort on the part of the employees, and the indications for the immediate future point to the same influences working in the same direction. A class consciousness on the part of the great mass of workers, whether agricultural or industrial, can hardly be said to exist in the Republic, and no representation of such a class is sought in the arbitration of wages or in the councils of the nation. There is no conflict between labor and capital, no wage contest on a large scale between organized employees and employers of large masses of labor. Both wages and other conditions of labor are still largely a matter of tradition, and the improvement that is taking place appears to be due almost entirely to forces outside the great masses of workmen themselves."

"The great levers by which the labor of the country can be raised to a higher level are universal education, both academic and industrial, European immigration and the introduction of machinery." Education is making very rapid progress and machinery is being rapidly introduced, although its use is restricted to a considerable extent by the low rate of wages, by the ignorance of employees and by the high price of fuels and the cost of repairs. The question of European immigration is rendered more difficult by the low rate of wages prevailing and until this condition shall have been remedied it seems improbable that any great movement of unskilled workers from Europe can take place. On the other hand, it is not improbable that an improvement within the country may eventually be accelerated by the small immigration which it may possibly attract. The question of Asiatic immigration is one of an entirely different nature and has already been discussed.

"Upon the whole the most encouraging view of Mexican labor is to be obtained by considering not the actual conditions, but the probable effect of tendencies now at work. These tendencies appear to be almost entirely in the direction of an improvement in the conditions of the laboring population, and while the progress which has been made has been exaggerated by many writers, and while the real wages of the population have not increased as rapidly as many persons have stated, there can be no doubt that all the tendencies at work are favoring the growth of an independent and intelligent working class. The indispensable condition to its future progress

is peace and a strong, intelligent government. The progress which has been made has been achieved in less than a generation, and although the work of uplifting the whole population to the standard of Western Europe is a herculean task, the progress already made renders it not improbable that the result will be achieved."

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